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RAIL TRAVEL newsletter

Volume 1 May 17, 1971 Number 12

An Open Letter to Amtrak

Paul Rayton: The Coast Daylight

THE COAST DAYLIGHT, the subject of the fourth in our series of articles by Paul Rayton from his forthcoming book, is the first train in this set of reports that is still running under Amtrak, though somewhat modified. Most recent information is that the automatic buffet car is still on the train (3 days a week the train is replaced by the Seattle-San Diego "Cascade" which carries a full diner). The dome lounge has not yet run on the Daylight, but rumors are that it will go on soon (the "Cascade" carries a regular full lounge). Oddly, the Amtrak schedule reversed the train numbers (98 and 99) of the now unnamed Daylight, but SP corrected them in its own new schedule. Neither schedule names either the Cascade or the Coast Daylight. The latter no longer leaves from San Francisco, but uses the Oakland depot.

LETTERS

Wonderful, Wonderful to see that Beebe lives, in Paul Rayton. Right On! ... Keep your Paul Rayton active, and send him one of my enclosed cards.

Richard B. Shull
New York, N.Y.

I am a passenger train fan and have traveled by rail all of my life. Recently our St. Paul Union Depot was closed to passenger service and our area lost many name trains with the formation of Amtrak. Like me, many people around my area are upset about this. But now the system has changed and Amtrak needs customers to continue.

Please continue your very well done newsletter. Amtrak needs both improvements and--especially--passengers.

Robert H. Daniels
St. Paul, Minn.

. . . . . .

WE ARE PRINTING as "An Open Letter to Amtrak" in this issue a letter directed to NRPC from Richard M. Langworth, who sent us a copy. Mr. Langworth is Associate Editor of Automobile Quarterly, and has an abiding interest in the finer aspects of travel, including trains.

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AMTRAK PETERS IN--CHAPTER TWO

When the small cloud of smoke had cleared following the National Railroad Passenger Corporation's inauspicious beginning on May 1, what was left was the growing realization on the part of many that the passenger train system the nation is now stuck with is totally inadequate. Instead of a new renaissance of rail travel that had been talked about, the reality that presented itself seemed to be merely a further downgrading of the mess that existed as of April 30. Many name trains were gone, many areas of the nation found themselves without train service altogether, the trains that remained looked pretty much the same and were being run by the same disinterested personnel, and perhaps worst of all, the corporation set up to save and renew train travel was so grossly impoverished that there seemed no foreseeable way in which it could begin to do adequately the job Congress had assigned it.

The National Association of Railroad Passengers had sharp criticism for Amtrak. Its Chairman, Anthony Haswell, had specific complaints he presented to a Senate subcommittee. Recall that NARP had long supported, and indeed played an important role in getting the Amtrak legislation set up. However, now that Amtrak was rolling it was clear to Haswell that the law provided very inadequate funding to allow Amtrak to pursue its tasks. Additionally, the way the law was being interpreted and administered by Amtrak presented some important problems.

A major problem was that Amtrak was not itself running the passenger service, but only contracting with the existing railroad structure to do the job for Amtrak. Amtrak has the legal power to hire its own personnel to run the trains, but Amtrak's administrators chose not to do this. Said Haswell: "We are convinced that if Amtrak is to succeed, it must build its own organization of officers and employees who run the services that the sales people are trying to attract the public to. The railroad passenger business is a labor-intensive personal service operation, closely analogous to the hotel or restaurant business. Employees in all essential functions must be fully accountable to management. Otherwise, costs cannot be controlled and service standards enforced. Unless the men and women operating the trains, serving food, selling tickets, servicing and cleaning equipment, and performing other essential tasks are Amtrak employees, receiving Amtrak paychecks, and directly accountable to Amtrak supervisors, there is little hope for ever providing rail passenger service of the quality necessary to attract meaningful numbers

of travelers back to the rails and make a real contribution to our transportation problems."

Haswell pointed out also that Amtrak would never become a profitable operation under the present arrangement, and that it would function more like the ICC than like any business organization. "When any employee does not perform up to par, either in terms of public service or of efficiency, Amtrak's only resort is to complain to the contracting railroad. There seems little prospect that the railroad will be any more enthusiastic about assuming the day-to-day headaches of passenger service for the benefit of Amtrak than it has up to now on its own account..."

The need to expand the present constricted Amtrak system was also an important subject of Haswell's testimony before the Senators. So far there was little to show from Amtrak in the way of new service. Four Metroliners had been added for a total of 9 round trips, but these would have been put on even without Amtrak, being funded by the Office of High Speed Ground Transport. The planned revival of the California Zephyr fizzled, and Amtrak was powerless in the face of Rio Grande's refusal to enter the system. According to NARP, if Amtrak were hiring its own people to run trains, the ICC could order Rio Grande to make its route available for an Amtrak-run Zephyr to use. NARP asked individuals to write their Senators and Representatives about these problems and to send NARP copies of their letters.

NARP was not the only vocal critic of Amtrak's administration. Sen. Warren Magnuson of Washington and Rep. Harley Staggers of West Virginia sent off a hot letter to Amtrak about mid-month demanding that NRPC investigate additional train routes to add to its system.

Meanwhile Massachusetts arranged with Amtrak to subsidize a route from Boston to N.Y. and Washington via Worcester & Springfield. This run was to start May 17, but was delayed by the rail strike (see p.5).

Amtrak's advertising campaign has not really begun, tho it has placed announcements of train service in newspapers of cities along its system. Its second nationwide ad was a masterpiece of bad timing, appearing on May 17 just as all the nation's roads went out on strike. Other announcements of Metroliner service have appeared in the East: "Comfortable and roomy, Amtrak's Metroliners zip you to Washington in under 3 hours, midtown to midtown. Contour seats. Soft music. Snack bar or full-course meal. Take a Metroliner. Why should you look like you just got off a plane?"

TWO-DAY RAILROAD STRIKE: THE BEGINNINGS OF CHAOS

At 6:00am Monday, May 17, the relatively small (10,000-member) Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen went on strike against the nation's railroads. Negotiations had broken down, and all legal means for stalling the strike had been exhausted. Only Congress or the courts remained as means of preventing it, and as Congress was adjourned as the strike was called, it could not act to pass emergency legislation until after the walkout had already begun.

Monday morning nearly all the nation's passenger, commute, and freight trains were idled (exceptions were the Long Island Railroad and the South Shore Line in Chicago). Here and there a few trains were operated by non-striking personnel, for example on the Northwestern Pacific which was too small to warrant pickets. Administrative personnel of Central of New Jersey ran 3 commute trains morning and evening to handle about one-tenth of the normal commute load.

By Tuesday night Congress had passed a bill requiring the workers to return until October 1 and granting them a pay increase in the meantime. Normal operations were resuming on Wednesday. But while the short strike was on--only the fourth nationwide strike in about 50 years--chaotic conditions were either forecast or beginning. Industrial slowdowns and shutdowns were starting, particularly in the auto industry. Commuters across the country either stayed home or got to work by other means. The stock market immediately plunged. Amtrak's 184 trains stopped running. The railroad strike dominated the headlines for 2 or 3 days.

A Ringling Brothers circus train could not reach New York City, and elephants were walked through the Lincoln Tunnel from South Kearny, NJ. Third and fourth class mail would not be accepted for distances over 300 miles. About 300,000 commuters were affected by the strike.

In the West, Amtrak operations were affected as follows: the San Diego-Seattle "Cascade" was stopped at Klamath Falls, Oregon and its 77 passengers transferred to 3 buses. The "Sunset" halted at Tucson with 102 aboard. The Chicago to Oakland "City of S.F." stopped at Ogden and over 50 riders were bused on. The "Super Chief" from Chicago to Los Angeles reached its destination just five minutes before the strike began.

There were no reports of tremendous hardships wrought by the two-day stoppage, but it became clear that the country would not be able to do without its railroads for any protracted time period.

ON FIRST RIDING AMTRAK

(Or ... How I Fared on My First Encounter with NRPC)

By George Hyko

Amtrak was just a few days old when the exciting moment arrived when I could take my first trip on a semi-government controlled passenger train. "I would like a one-way ticket from Oakland to San Jose, please." I tried to act like an ordinary passenger, not a travel writer. I'd come to the Santa Fe ticket office in San Francisco because it is very convenient to a trans-bay commuter; Amtrak has another office at the SP commute train depot in S.F., convenient only for Peninsula commuters. I didn't want to buy my fare at the last moment in Oakland--experience told me to allow as much time as possible before the hour of departure. Also, I'd just read Stanford Horn's account in the May SAN FRANCISCO Magazine of his last trip on the City of S.F. It took him 12 days to get tickets. Of course, Amtrak must have changed all that by now.

"Oh! I can't sell you that!" To say I was taken aback by the agent's response is an understatement. I forgot my assumed role of ordinary passenger for a moment, and instead of walking away never to return, I asked "Why not?" Here was my great moment spoiled. It was just as if there'd been no change at all (except fewer trains to ride).

The agent consulted with the three other agents in the little office. (I was the only customer.) "Tell him to go over to 3rd Street and take a commuter" said one, with a bit of hostility. "I can't sell you a ticket to San Jose through Oakland. We have orders..." He showed me a pencilled notation on a memo.

Finally he got the message that I wanted to go from Oakland to San Jose, not from San Francisco to San Jose via Oakland. "You stinker! Why didn't you tell me that before?" Of course I had. He wrote out the ticket without further ado. The same old tickets with all the carbons and red tape.

I enjoyed the train. It was the "Cascade," now running from Seattle to San Diego. Among the train crew was a new air of optimism, a new friendliness like the old days. The cars were the familiar SP cars. The diner was an "Audubon" diner decorated with bird paintings and built by Budd for the Sunset Limited in 1950. The menu was the familiar, expensive SP menu. The rosebuds were plastic, the linen nonexistent. But things were changing. The route was new (the track quite wiggly) and the scenery novel. But the crew, with their Amtrak buttons, seemed filled with new enthusiasm for making it a good trip. Maybe they wouldn't even need Amtrak's charm school. Things may be looking up.

KEEPING TRACK

...with Paul Rayton

(A regular RTN feature. Each issue presents another review-critique of a selected pre-Amtrak train.)

COAST DAYLIGHT

Date: Thursday, August 13, 1970

The Official Guide betrayed that the mighty Southern Pacific still operated a dome-lounge car on the coast run between Los Angeles and San Francisco during the summer season.

But it's not as easy as that. This, after all, was 1970, and you don't take these things for granted--not on SP! I telephoned the SP agents in Los Angeles to ask about the dome car. A confused agent said that yes, they ran the dome car, he thought, but it didn't run every day. Did he know about tomorrow, for example? "No, we never know what will go out on any particular day." Actually, we did have a dome car on our chosen day of departure, but the only way I was able to confirm that was to call San Francisco and check with the yard. Check with the yard!

On this day we left Los Angeles promptly at 8:30am. On other occasions we hadn't done as well. One day we waited for a "connection" (due in at 6:30am, arrived at 9:15am). On another eventful day we had no conductor to give us authority to leave the station, so we sat, wistfully reading the timetable and pondering the nasty letter we might write, until somebody finally got "the word." We then proceeded 6 miles to the suburban Glendale station where sleepy conductor and late train were reunited. Is this any way to run a railroad?

The Southern Pacific once operated a far-flung passenger network, including through sleeping cars to New York through both Chicago and New Orleans. Today almost all of that is gone, and the whole scale of operations has been considerably cut down. The death of these operations left a plethora of unusual and specialized equipment. Seen today it provides a testimonial to good intentions and missed opportunities. It is an unusual legacy continuing in use--after a fashion. For instance, there are two unusual types of coaches found in the consist today. Both are interesting and different from most eastern coaches in several significant ways.

The first is a "Sunset" coach, originally built for the SUNSET LIMITED when it was re-equipped in 1950. They were built by the Budd Co., and have the usual Budd-style fluted stainless steel exterior. Being made for comparatively long hauls, they were designed with a seating capacity of only 44 and leg rests are provided. Seats are relatively plush, being a soft fabric covering with a leather fringing. On the walls at either end of the car there are large color pictures in garish '50s color depicting scenes along the Sunset route: "The Alamo, San Antonio" or "Southern Arizona Guest Ranch." Little plastic curtains (some cars still have cloth) are found on the wall between the windows. Most of these cars give little other clue to their origin, their outside being identified only with a number. On many of these, though, if the light is at the proper angle, you can see the painted name "Sunset Limited" still lingering in the metal, defying efforts of sandblast and SP to eradicate its birthright.

Mixed in among the cars in no particular order are the "Daylight" cars, remarkable particularly for their immense windows. These cars were built to take advantage of the spectacular scenery in California and Oregon. The windows are the next best thing to a dome car. They measure almost 3 feet high and 5½ feet wide. That is a lot of glass. "Sunset" windows, for example, are only 2 feet high and about 3 feet wide. The size and height of the window enables you to look out while standing up, a refreshing change. The interiors of the "Daylight" cars are mostly solid color schemes. All paint and vinyl on the seats are matching colors, usually light shades of green or blue. The net effect is very cheerful, especially when sunlight is pouring in the windows.

Another SP exclusive in the "Daylight" cars was the "baggage elevator," an interior hoist incorporated into coaches to assist passengers loading their luggage aboard. It lifted trunks directly up to the baggage storage area at the end of the car. Alas, this long ago was sealed up and relegated to memory.

Another trivial but intriguing aspect of this car is the logo inscribed in the linoleum floor. It is at first glance just a design, but study it for a moment and it is actually an "SP."

SP long ago gave up their automatic car washer in Los Angeles. So the cleaning is done by a lemming-like pack of ladies. They descend upon the train when it arrives in town, and in some ways represent an improvement over ACWs. By some standards these clean windows alone are enough to recommend this ride.

The first hour is consumed getting through the San Fernando Valley--monotonous, seemingly endless suburbs of Los Angeles. Burbank, North Hollywood, Van Nuys, Northridge pass beside you beneath the smog. At Chatsworth (yet another suburb) we slow and start to climb Santa Susana Pass, capped off with a mile-long tunnel.

California topography changes as fast as weather in New England. Between Santa Susana and the ocean, you pass for about an hour through the Simi valley, a curious confabulation of tract homes and tract plantings of beans, sugar beets, or flowers.

Ventura marks the start of the scenic California coastline. From here to Santa Barbara you are just a few feet about sea level. Summer homes and campgrounds dot the shore. Out in the water, hulking black spidery shapes mark the infamous offshore oil wells.

Northwards from the pretty town of Santa Barbara, once again you come back along the coast. And here is where you see the full breadth of the Pacific Coast unfold before you. Occasionally you run almost at water level; usually you are up on a bluff perhaps 100 feet above the sea. When the water is clear (as it usually is) you can see rock formations and sea life beneath the water. Pelicans and porpoises are occasionally spotted. This spectacular show runs for well over 1½ hours, featuring misty seascapes, wide open grassy fields, sand formations, rock cliffs, and all the geology you could want. Sometimes, while traversing a

field, you will see a ravine suddenly approaching. Crossing over it, look down, and way at the bottom of the hill are the tireless waves, still working on wearing down the hills to their level. When we were blessed with clear sunlight, careful observation showed the ocean to be greeting us with three distinct hues: yellow, green, and blue. If it should be cloudy--and at some point in the trip it is likely to be--the sea will turn steel gray.

Point Conception is a distinct bulge in the layout of the state. It sports a lighthouse, and the point itself is more or less responsible for (1) the warmer ocean water off Southern California and (2) the fog bank that you are likely to find north of the point. Depending on the fog and clouds, you may see some of the missiles at Vandenburg AFB. Sometimes all you can see are tall dark spires lurking off in the fog, tall gantry cranes in which men are probably working.

San Luis Obispo marks the approximate mid-point of the trip. Northward from there we climb the spectacular Santa Lucia pass. The climb to the crest involves almost an hour of continuous upgrade, and soon you look down into the valley from which you came.

About this time, all the sightseeing made us hungry, so we went to find the car which provides, according to the public timetable, "food and beverage service."

This has to be one of the most sordid aspects of this train. The gustatory experience in this car is comparable to that of the worst depression-born greasy spoon along highway US 66. The car ("Automatic Buffet Car") is an old Pullman sleeper rebuilt into this miserable excuse for food service. SP claims to have spent $50,000 apiece to remodel these cars in 1962, but it is very hard to see where the money went. The decor of the car might be categorized as "factory lunchroom." Walls are painted stale yellow and are devoid of any effort at decoration. The completely rude tables have a formica top, and the chairs must be a joke. Each has a vinyl covering in a different bright color. I guess the idea was to give a bright appearance to the car, but the result is a helter-skelter rainbow that, with the aforementioned walls, looks ludicrous. The center area of the car consists of two opposing rows of slot machines. Everyone is on his own in this self-service wonderland. Patrons ricochet between the machines, carrying plastic cups full of hot coffee--freshly created from prefabricated goo stored in the "hot drink" machine. Hot tea is available too, its flavor generally adulterated by this demoniacal device. These hot drinks cost .15.

Only the daring or foolish venture into this no-man's-land of prepackaged foods, belched out at you by uncaring machines. Probably the biggest mistake I ever made was to order the "scrambled eggs with sausage" ($1.35). These come out cold and you heat them in one of the microwave ovens "provided for your convenience." (Otherwise I guess we'd have to eat it cold.) Well, this egg concoction has to be one of the most stomach-turning creations going. The yellow of these things looks almost appetizing, but the taste...well, if you've ever eaten Saran Wrap with salt, you'll have an idea of the mouthwarming thrill I got as I tasted the eggs. The sausage was a little better--it tasted rather like paper.

Such nightmares made me hesitant to try anything else. However, other experiences weren't so bad: the beef stew (.65) comes

out of a can and can be warmed up; the crackers (.10) come out of individual wrappers, likewise milk (.25). Dime ice cream bars sell for .20. The coffee was at least drinkable. If you wish your doughnuts (.30) to taste "fresh from the bakery" you can try heating them in the microwave oven--but they'll get soggy. You will have more luck with coffee rolls (.30). The necessity of eating off paper plates doesn't make the food any more delectable.

God help you if you have a long delay en route. These infernal machines have a definitely finite supply of food, and once it's gone, it is gone. No improvisation is possible. The unlucky late eater may be left only stewed prunes (.35) or ice water.

Watch it with those ovens, too! You can burn some things to a well-done crisp in short order if you're not careful. In case one of the machines acts up or you need change, there is an attendant for the car, who tries, against overwhelming odds, to take pride in his work. The attendants are helpful for the most part, but occasionally sounded testy when replying to questions from me. I guess I'd be testy myself if I had to work in that place. Down at the far end of the car, I saw some attendants preparing some food too. They ate it with great gusto, so it seemed unlikely that they had bought it from their machines. Closer inspection showed that they had brought their own sausage and eggs, and were cooking it with their tricky ovens. Aha! A solution!

On one occasion, I have to admit, I was so brazen as to bring my own materials, and attempted to bake brownies in one of the ovens. For a few moments it smelled fine. I walked to the end of the car to discuss the event with friends. Sudden cries caused me to look back, where great billows of smoke emanated from the diabolical machine. I rushed back, but it was too late. The brownies were a total loss, and yours truly came in for a sound lecture from the attendants. Thus ended my great brownie experiment.

Back in the dome lounge, spirits are better. This SP dome car is one of the nicest on the road. The entire length of the 85-foot car has curved glass forming the dome, and not just one single pane, but a double window that goes higher and lower than any other car I have been in. There are 12 glass divisions, which means 48 separate curved windows in the car--at a price of $300 each, I'm told. The bartender, a man named Bill Simpkins, is an old SP man who knows the route by heart. At each town or villa, beach or park, he announces for the audience in his domain. Serving screwdrivers as he talks, he calls out, "Big city! Beautiful downtown Paso Robles"--and there it is, right outside the window.

While we were eating, we started to traverse the fabled Salinas Valley, the land which John Steinbeck documented. Here the full vastness of California ranching comes into view. The irrigated fields with row upon green rown extend out into the distance, where they all seem to run together in little stroboscopic patterns. Small towns race by. Carloads of vegetables stand, soon to be rushed off to markets in the cities. As we progress northward, the farm vegetation slowly changes to include more fruits, like apples and peaches. Even some vineyards can be seen on nearby hills, sunning themselves while preparing for fall grape harvest. And yes, wine-tasting cellars are found along the parallel road. I wonder why they don't stock any California wines on this train?

From San Jose on, it is almost the reverse of departing from Los Angeles--running back through the suburbs. You are afforded fleeting views of San Francisco Bay to the east. The mountains that are the San Francisco peninsula parade along on your left.

Our arrival in San Francisco was at 6:20pm, only five minutes late.

The roadbed for this trip is reasonably smooth. There is not much welded rail down, and along the coast there are some sharp turns which make you lean a bit. But by comparison with some tracks, this aspect of the ride is pleasing. I'd grade it, overall, a B-.

One final note for prospective travelers: although this trip was taken from south to north, it is my experience that, given a choice, this ride should be made from north to south (SF to LA). The reason is that the "night and morning" fog and mists along the coast often do not clear away until about noon, and the weather along the coast will be much brighter if you pass it in the afternoon, as you do on the southbound run.

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WARNING ISSUED ON MICROWAVE OVENS

The New York State Health Commissioner warned May 7 that individuals operating microwave ovens, as used on some passenger trains, should maintain a distance of at least an arm's length while they are on, and should be sure they are turned off before opening the door. The health hazard is that microwave energy is absorbed by the human body, heating body tissue. Especially prone to damage is eye tissue, in which dissipation of heat is slow. Proper maintenance of ovens is also essential; door seals can deteriorate with age and leak potentially dangerous microwaves.

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An Open Letter to Amtrak

Mr. David W. Kendall
Chairman of the Board
National Rail Passenger Corp.
955 L'Enfant Plaza
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Mr. Kendall,

While there is much for Amtrak to imitate in airline transportation methods, by making rail transport too much like air transport you may be damaging Amtrak's chances for success.

In its April 19th issue, RAIL TRAVEL NEWSLETTER reported that Amtrak is seriously considering the elimination of railroad dining cars in favor of meals served at seats, as on airliners. This may be a grave mistake. I urge you to weigh the decision carefully.

The railroad dining car is one of the civilities that makes rail transport distinguishable from cattle transport on the typical American airliner. In days when the railroads themselves were still pushing passenger service the high standards of food and service on dining cars was one of their trump cards. I think Amtrak might well attempt to revive those aspects of rail travel which help distinguish it from the production-line service of the airlines, especially through first class service in well-appointed dining cars.

Low dining car patronage is no excuse for abandoning the system any more than low passenger count is reason for abandoning the passenger train. Diners have been subjected to the same discouragements as general passengers at the hands of railroads, all of which you are probably aware. There is plenty of time for passengers to get to the diner on most medium and long distance trains, and through fine service and heavy promotion, the dining car, I feel, could turn out to be one of your best drawing points.

Please give it a try, and best wishes for success.

Sincerely,

Richard M. Langworth

QUOTES OF THE WEEK ***

"In enacting the Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970, Congress intended that rail passenger service would become truly attractive and responsive to public need. It did not intend that business would be done in the same old way by the same old management concealed by banners, stickers, flyers, and balloons labeled AMTRAK. If Congress cannot obtain binding assurance from AMTRAK that it will exercise its right to build its own organization and run its own service, it must amend the Act to require such action."

--NARP Chairman Anthony Haswell in testimony before a Senate Subcommittee on Transportation Appropriations in April

"We urge that this ridiculous situation be changed without delay. We are not at all satisfied with preliminary information received thus far about start-up costs for the corporation. When it comes to lawyers and press relations, the corporation seems to have lost its status as pauper but rather is operating as if it were turning a huge profit. The attitude of bargain-hunter should be adopted immediately by the corporation. One of the most serious issues before you right now is whether the corporation will in fact improve the quality of service, the only reason for its existence."

--Letter to Amtrak from Sen. Magnuson and Rep. Staggers, authors of the bill that created Amtrak

SLIP OF THE MONTH CLUB ***

Either the picture captions were reversed on page 3 of the June issue of Railroad Magazine, or else French train riders have returned to 1940s fashions and the 1947 GM Train of Tomorrow was an amazingly accurate predictor of the long hair and mini-skirt styles of the early 1970s.

. . . . . .

HOW TO KILL A PASSENGER TRAIN No. 11 of a series

As we've said before, we'll be much better off if Amtrak is a dismal failure. Then we can forget all this nonsense about hauling people around in trains. Right now, things are looking bright. If Amtrak goes on the way it's begun, we'll soon be rid of those pesky passengers. The thing we must guard against strongly is letting Amtrak get enough money to do their job thoroughly. With their present tiny budget, we've nothing to fear. Let's keep it small, even if it means hiring extra lobbyists to do the job.

EDITORIAL: AMTRAK MISSES THE BOAT

If one had set out to design an inadequate, irrational national railroad passenger system, with some thought one might have done a more thorough job than Amtrak did--but it's not likely.

Take for example Senator Mike Mansfield's complaint that his home state of Montana is served by one rail line, the northerly route of the "Empire Builder." Why this route was chosen rather than the "North Coast Limited" route, when the latter reaches a number of larger cities than the one chosen, has not been answered. Note also that service is daily along that run (Seattle-Chicago), while the San Francisco-Chicago route has only a tri-weekly train to serve an area of larger population. Prior to May 1, San Francisco had a fine daily (Santa Fe) train to Chicago, plus the tri-weekly City of San Francisco to the same city (the service had been tri-weekly for only one year; before that there was a choice of 3 daily trains to the Windy City).

The idea of a less-than-daily service on a major route should not be entertained by an agency supposedly concerned with the public's transportation needs. The tri-weekly concept is an outgrowth of a dying transportation system, killed by its best friends and worst enemies. To revive it, we should not use the very ideas that cropped up as poor compromises in its last stages of life. The public will not adapt to a system that is not conveniently scheduled. As an exercise, try planning a vacation by rail around the country, using the Amtrak schedule with its tri-weekly trains up and down the West Coast, through the Southwest, and from San Francisco through Denver to Chicago. We bet you'll never work such a trip into your scheduled vacation time. And of course, many places you'd want to visit can't be reached by train at all.

There is a simple one-word solution behind this predicament--money. Amtrak doesn't have enough of it. This country has enough money for all sorts of boondoggles and moondoggles, but apparently not enough to provide us with a reasonable railroad passenger system. As Railroad Magazine (July) put it: "But why does our Federal Government find billions in tax money to fight a cruel war in Asia and collect dusty specimens of rock from the moon and yet 'can't afford' an all-out financing of passenger trains as a public service?" We don't know the answer to that question either.

TRAINS IN THE MEDIA

As Summer vacation plans are being made around the country, we are bombarded by ads inviting us hither and yon, by various modes of conveyance--plane, auto, bus, ship--but not by train.

With the exception of Canadian, European and Japanese rail ads, passenger trains have all but dropped from sight. Amtrak's advertising campaign has not yet begun, and the few individual railroads still running trains without contract from Amtrak have not been heard from. Without a doubt, American passenger train miles will reach a new low this year. Partly it will be because Amtrak has eliminated a huge chunk of train service. Partly it will be because the would-be savers of passenger trains missed the boat and missed the Summer travel season of 1971. (Besides, as this is written, new threats of a national rail strike are further dampening would-be train travelers' plans.)

But those other countries know they have a good thing going, and thus the only trains we see in the media are not in the U.S.A. Witness the nice Canadian National ad, part of which is seen below, featuring an Art Nouveau rendition of a CN train. Notice that a British agency paid for full-page, full-color ads in Life, The New Yorker, and probably elsewhere (and those ads aren't cheap!) just to show us a little steam train running in the British Isles. Look at the size of the campaign the Eurailpass people mount to lure us to Europe. Obviously they don't expect to profit only on trains. Not long ago the U.S. had a drive to keep travelers from leaving the country. Do you think more people would See America First if they could travel as they can overseas?